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ABSTRACT

Use of portfolios as a tool for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher development and evaluation, using principles and practices borrowed from portfolio use to assess learner progress, is advocated. The origins of portfolios in art and other professions and their adaptation for teaching are outlined. The structure of such a portfolio is then discussed, with three forms of materials to be incorporated: materials from the teacher (statement of teaching responsibilities, course description and instructional materials, reflective statement, self-evaluation); materials from others about the teacher (colleague and supervisor statements, student course evaluations, evidence of research); and the products of good teaching (student test scores, student work samples, statements of subsequent student academic and career outcomes). An experiment with portfolio use for teacher assessment in one department is described, including types of portfolio materials selected and what they revealed about instructional innovation. Finally, basic questions about portfolio design and use are addressed. Contains five references. (MSE)

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Teacher Portfolios, Vehicles of Faculty Assessment, Reflection and Growth

Glayol Ekbatani & Herbert Pierson

Introduction - Why the Teacher Portfolio in ESL?

As good teaching becomes a prominent and permanent feature in faculty evaluation, ESL department heads or supervisors are beginning to realize that personnel actions dealing with teacher recruitment, tenure, and promotion should ideally employ a range of evidence to reach fair and valid conclusions. Periodic observation of classroom behavior and the occasional paper and pencil test have been the standard approaches to this kind of assessment. While not faulting their validity, they do in fact have limitations in capturing the complexity of teaching behavior. These approaches can indicate how teachers think and how well they are personally integrating their professional knowledge, but the information tends to be static and never provides the whole picture. Because of this limitation, our college level ESL department has been looking for alternate ways to meet the challenge of fuller knowledge in teacher assessment by seeking a non-intrusive and non-threatening mode of evaluation to complement the annual required classroom observation of teachers.

As a result we have borrowed principles and practices from learner portfolio pedagogy in our efforts to assess both new and experienced teachers, as well as to encourage teacher reflection and professional growth. This comes at a time when the use of portfolios is gaining more acceptance as a pedagogical tool in both ESL and developmental writing classrooms as a means to gauge student progress and to encourage student reflection and self-assessment.

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The Teacher Portfolio

Although it might seem to some that the teacher portfolio is an "an exercise in amassing paper" (Olson, 1988) or a mere addenda to the personnel file, this most assuredly was not our intention. To put the teacher portfolio into proper perspective, we must understand it as an idea borrowed from other professions and occupations. According to Bird (1990), the portfolio is by analogy similar to the folders, sketchbooks, and journals of creative workers like artists and writers, and the files and records produced by professional workers like business executives and social workers. On one hand, one would expect creative workers to have portfolios or something akin to them, which would be exhibited regularly, consisting of the outcome of their creativity. They are direct evidence of the quality, industry and talent of an individual creator. On the other hand, the portfolios of professional workers would not consist of the products of their work, but rather records, by-products, or tools of their work. Here one would not expect a sampling of their best work, but rather a fuller account of their work, for example, all of a social worker's cases in a given period, not just the ones with successful conclusions. The content of these portfolios would point to professional competence, pride of work, and a degree of self-concern, but would not be brilliantly displayed any more than an accountant would overlay his books with gold.

Derived from artistic and professional enterprise and applied to the teaching profession, the portfolio concept could become nothing more than another empty bureaucratic term for the busy ESL teacher. Therefore, it is expedient for us to see why compiling a portfolio is a worthy endeavor for teachers by clearly establishing its link to teacher assessment, growth and development, and reflection. To become plausible in teaching, the borrowed portfolio concept must be reconstructed for its new setting. One could start by

replacing the image of the sketchbooks and notebooks of the creative worker and the logs and attaché cases of the professional worker with representations more congenial to the teaching profession. As we will see, teachers would be expected to keep a set of folders or envelopes that that given an account of both significant and routine aspects of their teaching.

According to Bird (1990) the teacher portfolio is documentation consisting of such items as lesson "plans, teaching materials, student assignments, and written feedback to students (p. 244). While being additional input in evaluating teachers, the teacher portfolio, during the process of compilation, also has the potential to promote personal reflection as well as professional growth and development in both novice and experienced teachers. For the novice teacher, the portfolio could plainly contribute to his/her formal initiation into the ESL profession, the early period of teaching which calls for collegial support, constant feedback, supervision and mentoring. The portfolio provides senior teachers and supervisors with the occasion to intervene to assess and reinforce the positive attainments of the novice teacher. For the experienced teacher, the portfolio is an occasion to reflect over and demonstrate his/her professional growth, creativity and expertise, and in some cases indicate deficiency and the need for corrective measures to improve or redirect a teaching career.

The Structure of the Teacher Portfolio

Some advocates of the teacher portfolio (Barton & Collins, 1993; Johnson, 1997) have stated that to be truly effective and useful the portfolio must be carefully defined, suggesting that certain structural elements should be present in the portfolio such as a general goal statement, different levels of evidence, and a set of well delineated assessment criteria. However, when all is said and done, most writers (Sedin, 1991) would agree that a teacher portfolio should

contain three basic elements: 1) materials from the teacher; 2) materials from others about the teacher; and 3) the products of good teaching.

The materials from the teacher would comprise such items as a statement of teaching responsibilities, a description of the course, examples of course materials and assignments, and a reflective statement in which the teacher describes his/her instructional strategies, teaching philosophy, and career goals. Also included might be a self-evaluation by the teacher, a statement of the steps being taken to evaluate and improve one's teaching, and representative course outlines that detail course content and objectives, teaching methods, readings, homework assignments, along with a reflective statement why the course was designed in a certain way.

Material from others would consist of statements from colleagues and supervisors who have observed the teacher in the classroom, course evaluations from students, evidence of involvement in and publication of action research that has a direct bearing on one's teaching.

The products of good teaching might consist of student scores on teacher-made or standardized tests, examples of student excellence in creative work or essays, and a statement about the effects of the course on the subsequent academic career choices and successes of students.

Teacher Portfolios in an ESL Program

To test the viability of portfolio principles in teacher assessment, our department has been experimenting with the teacher portfolios in a credit-bearing course on reading and writing as a means of: (1) providing feedback to teachers; (2) input for the annual teacher personnel review; (3) encouraging teacher reflection, growth and development; and (4) finally sharing ideas and creativity within the faculty. Three full-time and four adjunct faculty members

participated in this initial teacher portfolio exercise. The teacher portfolios submitted generally consisted of student writing samples with teacher feedback, the teaching syllabus, sample lesson plans, and supplementary teaching materials. The following variety of items were contained in the portfolios submitted:

- The complete writing work of an average student
- Sample topic sentences developed by students before drafting essays
- Student writing along with revisions
- Student assessment materials
- Editing guides
- Course outlines/syllabi
- Student information sheets
- Assessment guidelines for students
- Sample in-class reading materials
- Relevant excerpts from student journals
- Grammar worksheets
- Unsolicited/spontaneous student feedback to the teacher

The Assessment Process and Teacher Portfolios

Similar to other assessment tools, we believed that the teacher portfolio could serve as an added assessment instrument, if it could validly and reliably measure/demonstrate that the content contained therein was consistent with general program goals and the goals of the reading and writing course. Simply stated, the goals of the reading and writing course have been to assist students writers to write grammatically accurate and semantically coherent academic papers in a variety of rhetorical patterns. Therefore, what was sought in the teacher portfolios was an indication that this goal was being met. In other words, there was evidence of frequent writing assignments, constructive feedback, an effective positive approach in treating errors in mechanics and usage, clear guidelines in organizing ideas, indications of the learners' full participation in the monitoring of their learning process with self and peer editing, and finally evidence of student revision that clearly incorporated teacher feedback.

We achieved this end by suggesting to the participating teachers that the portfolios submitted contain at least one complete set of the written work produced by an average student, along with the written feedback to the student. These materials served as a useful basis for the subsequent teacher-supervisor personnel action conferences and created an opportunity for offering recommendations, and incidentally sharing the findings of current research on responding to student writing.

Source of Instructional Innovation

In reviewing the portfolios, especially those of experienced teachers, it was discovered serendipitously that these portfolios indeed can reveal the presence of creativity and innovation at a level not dissimilar to what is found in creative portfolios. Examples were students editing guides, reaction writing instructions, collaborative writing exercises, procedures for writing letters to newspapers, all of which could be shared with other teachers in the program. Furthermore, the portfolios revealed new information on specific teacher strengths, their teaching philosophies, and innovative classroom management styles, which most probably would have remained hidden and not shared if we relied entirely on traditional classroom visitation to elicit such information. This additional information about faculty strengths makes the advocacy of program directors and department heads during personnel action reviews of individual teachers stronger and more authentic.

Key Questions about Teacher Portfolios

Although in this paper we have been speaking positively about the teacher portfolio in ESL, there are several unanswered questions. The first one to come to mind is to ask why a teacher would be motivated to produce a

portfolio? One answer might be that it would give a more complete and fuller account of what the teacher is doing professionally, thereby explaining in depth or correcting what has been observed in the classroom or heard informally via the institutional "grapevine". In any fair-minded institution the teacher portfolio could further justify and clarify a teacher's professional behavior, remove unnecessary misunderstandings, and enhance his/her professional standing in the institution.

Second, what documents or artifacts should be contained in the portfolio? Naturally, anything that is required by the supervisor or the administration, but also anything else which will substantiate the growth and professional competence of the individual teacher under review. Here is a time when the teacher need not hide his "light under a bushel", but rather confidently display his professional efforts as manifested in both conventional and innovative teaching behavior.

Third, how would the portfolio be used and judged? They would ideally be judged on the level of professional competence evidenced in the portfolio as well as their congruence with the general and particular goals of the program. If the evidence in the portfolio does in fact enhance the professional standing of a teacher under review, it also serves as a potent contribution to the assessment process for tenure or promotion.

Fourth, what would these portfolio procedures require of the teacher? Teachers always have to keep records, and so by producing a portfolio individual teachers would possess a stronger incentive and purpose for keeping these records. Likewise, there would be motivation for reflection on specific lessons and for conscientiously saving pedagogical materials and notes.

Finally, what would be a portfolio's worth and to whom? The teacher portfolio would first of all be valuable for the individual teacher, as it would

demonstrate pride of work and professional competence. At the same time the results of the portfolio could be shared extensively with colleagues, thus enhancing the professional growth of the entire faculty.

Conclusion

By emphasizing the positive elements of growth and development in portfolio feedback to our teachers, we have intended to reduce the anxiety level which novice and often experienced teachers often associate with personnel assessment. Also, by adding portfolio material to the teacher assessment process, we are gaining a more equitable and holistic view of teaching quality, something which classroom observation alone cannot provide. Moreover, we have been able to identify creative and innovative aspects of teaching by examining the diverse teaching styles of individual teachers as reflected in their portfolios. Although the teacher portfolio is not the only way of evaluating teachers, it is an alternative process-oriented way of assessing and diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers, as well as providing constructive feedback.

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